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Defining the administrative functions of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Report of the Secretary-General*

Summary

The present report has been prepared in response to General Assembly resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, in which the Assembly endorsed the recommendation of the Committee for Programme and Coordination that the Secretary-General submit a report defining the administrative functions of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

The report describes the mandate, funding history and coordination role of the Office and the benefits of secure and predictable funding of its work and of the work of the United Nations, and proposes a conceptual framework and definition of the administrative functions of the Office, while identifying those standing functions that are critical to the discharge of its mandate.

* The report was delayed for technical reasons.

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I. Introduction

1. At its forty-third session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination expressed its appreciation for the critical and effective coordination role that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs had played in responding to various humanitarian emergencies related to natural disasters and complex emergencies.[1]

2. The Committee noted the heavy dependence of the Office on extrabudgetary resources, a situation that had put key functions at risk[2] and recommended that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a report defining administrative functions.[3] By resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee.

3. Subsequently, at its forty-fourth session, the Committee recognized that the effective implementation of the mandate of the Office involved ongoing functions at United Nations Headquarters, including humanitarian coordination, policy development in humanitarian activities, humanitarian advocacy, information analysis and dissemination, field support and the management of relevant inter-agency and interdepartmental mechanisms, and recommended that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to make recommendations to it at its sixtieth session on how to ensure the ongoing discharge of the key functions of the Office at Headquarters.[4]

4. The present report responds to the concerns of the Committee for Programme and Coordination by (a) describing the mandate, funding history and coordination role of the Office; (b) describing the benefits of secure and predictable funding of its work and of the work of the United Nations; and (c) proposing a conceptual framework and definition of the administrative functions of the Office, while identifying those standing functions that are critical to the discharge of its mandate.

II. Background

5. The end of the cold war has witnessed profound changes in the nature of armed conflict. While in the past, most wars were fought between States, today's conflicts are often fought within State borders and often by militias which regularly target and terrorize civilian populations. Also witnessed has been an increase in the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters, as climate change, environmental degradation, rapid urbanization and unsustainable development practices have made civilians more vulnerable to the destructive effects of the disasters. The humanitarian consequences of crises have accordingly become more acute, extensive and complex. However, the end of the cold war has also opened up the possibility for the United Nations to play a larger role in meeting the challenges posed by current crises.

6. The past 15 years have seen an increase in the number of actors responding to humanitarian crises. Today, it is not unusual for United Nations agencies, the Red Cross system of disaster response, donor and local governments, non-governmental organizations and civic groups all to arrive at the scene of an emergency to perform an ever-widening array of functions. The number and diversity of such actors has required a more focused effort by the United Nations to strengthen humanitarian

preparedness and provide a more coordinated humanitarian strategy and action plan in order to ensure an effective response.

7. It was against this backdrop that the General Assembly adopted resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, on strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian emergency assistance, by which it authorized the designation by the Secretary-General of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the merging of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordination and several disparate complex emergency structures into the Department of Humanitarian Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat.

8. The subsequent evolution of the role of the United Nations in responding to humanitarian crises, combined with the evolving demands and expectations of the Department, prompted a series of changes in the work and structure of the Department. The most significant took place in 1998 when, as part of the Secretary-General's programme for reform, the Department of Humanitarian Affairs was transformed into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its mandate was refocused on three key areas, coordination of humanitarian response, policy development and humanitarian advocacy (see A/51/950, paras. 187-188), and a new organizational structure for discharging these core functions was established.

9. In the light of the above and taking into account its experience, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in 2000, summarized its aim as the mobilization and coordination of effective and principled humanitarian action, in partnership with national and international actors, to alleviate human suffering, advocate the rights of people in need, promote preparedness and prevention and facilitate sustainable solutions.

III. Funding history

10. The Department of Humanitarian Affairs was established in 1992 through the consolidation of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator and various offices and units dealing with humanitarian affairs, most of which were predominantly financed from extrabudgetary resources. The Department inherited 61 regular budgetary posts and an appropriation of US$ 10.2 million, less than 8 per cent of the projected total requirements of the Department for the biennium 1992-1993. From its inception, the Department depended heavily on donor contributions to carry out its mandate.

11. The General Assembly, recognizing the need to rectify the financial constraints imposed on the Department, gradually increased its regular budgetary appropriation to US$ 19 million and 72 posts in the biennium 1994-1995, and to US$ 18.9 million and 75 posts in biennium 1996-1997.

12. When the Department was transformed into the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in January 1998 in the context of the Secretary-General's reform programme, the overall regular budgetary support for the Office was reduced from 75 posts and US$ 18.9 million to 50 posts and US$ 17.6 million for the biennium 1998-1999. To carry out its mandated tasks, the Office had to rely on extrabudgetary sources to fund 88 per cent of its total requirements during that period.

13. During the past three bienniums, the Office has received, with appreciation, incremental increases in its regular budgetary allocations. In the 2000-2001 biennium, the Office received an additional 4 regular budgetary posts, for a total of 54; in the 2002-2003 biennium, the regular budgetary post allocation was increased to 58 and, in the 2004-2005 biennium, to 61. At present, its regular budgetary appropriation of US$ 23.2 million represents 22 per cent of its headquarters requirements and 13 per cent of its overall requirements, including field activities. In the context of the overall United Nations budget, the appropriation represents 0.7 per cent.

14. The General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council have on many occasions invited the Secretary-General to submit proposals to improve the financial base of the Office. By resolutions 46/182, 47/168 of 22 December 1992 and 48/57 of 14 December 1993, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General to examine all possible ways and means of providing adequate qualified personnel and administrative resources commensurate with the responsibilities of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs from within existing resources of the regular budget. In its resolution 57/153 of 16 December 2003, the Assembly emphasized that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs should benefit from adequate and more predictable funding. Such statements by Member States reinforce the overall commitment of the Secretary-General to strengthening the regular budgetary component of the Office.

15. The recognition by Member States of the need to review the funding of the activities of the Office in the context of the overall programmatic priorities of the United Nations prompted the Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its forty-third session in 2003, to recommend that the General Assembly request the Secretary-General to submit a report defining the administrative functions of the Office. This led to the recommendation by the Committee, at its forty-fourth session in 2004, that the Assembly request the Secretary-General to make recommendations to it at its sixtieth session on how to ensure the ongoing discharge of the key functions of the Office at Headquarters.

IV. Role of the Office in a crisis: benefits of coordination

16. As derived from its mandate, the primary role of the Office in a crisis is to support the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator in ensuring that humanitarian action is timely, effective and coordinated, that it is appropriate to circumstances, that assistance occurs without duplication and that humanitarian activities conform to internationally agreed principles of humanity, impartiality and neutrality. In short, the Office aims to ensure that the collective response to humanitarian emergencies is greater than the sum of its parts.

17. Over time, humanitarian agencies and donors have come to realize that there are costs in time, resources and effectiveness, and risks to vulnerable populations, when coordination is not achieved. As a result, they have come to value the benefits of coordination and the role of the Office, which includes:

(a) **Coherent planning and preparedness.** The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs aims to strengthen overall humanitarian response by bringing together key humanitarian actors ahead of a crisis to develop contingency

plans, undertake common needs assessments, formulate humanitarian strategies and elaborate action plans, with clear divisions of responsibility. This provides strategic vision, avoids gaps and overlaps and improves service delivery to people in need;

(b) **Alignment of needs and resources.** Throughout a crisis, the Office coordinates inter-agency assessments to analyse trends, quantify needs and monitor progress. It aims to meet needs by coordinating the consolidated appeals process. Aligning needs and resources in this way ensures that assistance is needs-based and that competition for resources among agencies is minimized;

(c) **Faster and more effective life-saving assistance.** Ahead of a crisis, the Office develops and maintains emergency services and tools for the coordination of response to both natural disasters and complex emergencies, drawing on the capacity of governments and the wider humanitarian community. These include the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination (UNDAC) system, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) and the Military and Civil Defence Unit. The Office is also able to draw from its own staff and from professionals from the broader humanitarian community to deploy a surge capacity of trained field practitioners to support the humanitarian coordinator and the United Nations country team in the field in acute crises and on short notice. Well-maintained standby mechanisms and tools and a standing surge capacity are required to ensure that life-saving assistance is faster, better coordinated and more effective. The Office is also able to facilitate national, regional and international response through its management of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund which can bridge the immediate funding gap when a crisis occurs until such time as donor assistance arrives;

(d) **Access to more timely and relevant information.** The ability to effectively manage information in a timely manner during disasters and emergencies is an essential component of coordination, because information forms the very basis on which coordination can occur. The Office therefore contributes to an effective response through the collection, analysis and dissemination of data and information. Ahead of a crisis, the Office pools, analyses and disseminates early warning information on natural disasters and other emergencies. Once a crisis is under way, the Office collects and disseminates relevant information among national authorities, relief agencies and other relevant actors through a variety of communication tools, including situation reports and web sites, such as ReliefWeb and OCHA-Online, and through the development of custom mapping and database tools in its humanitarian information centres. In addition, the Office also has a specialized humanitarian reporting service, known as the Integrated Regional Information Network, which currently covers Africa, Central Asia and the Middle East;

(e) **Increased security for humanitarian staff.** Humanitarian organizations are operating in increasingly fluid and dangerous environments, in which new threats and challenges are affecting their ability to effectively carry out their work. The Office, therefore, works closely with the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator and humanitarian agencies to address security concerns and create an environment that allows humanitarian organizations and agencies to sustain humanitarian assistance to people in need;

(f) **A more principled and appropriate response.** The Office ensures that humanitarian assistance and protection are provided wherever there is need. It often

acts as an interlocutor with warring parties to gain access to vulnerable populations and to create an environment for their sustained protection. When a crisis requires a more coherent response from the United Nations system that includes coordination between humanitarian and military actors, the Office ensures that humanitarian assistance is provided in accordance with the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality, as well as independence. In addition, the Office engages in ongoing advocacy campaigns to raise the profile of forgotten emergencies and to ensure that assistance is given according to need and that protection is provided to the most vulnerable groups, such as internally displaced persons;

(g) **Improved inter-agency coordination.** The Office coordinates with its partners in regard to humanitarian response and policy concerns through two principal coordination mechanisms: with other Secretariat departments, through the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, and with its humanitarian partners, including the funds, programmes and specialized agencies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and international organizations, such as the World Bank and the Red Cross movement, through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. By facilitating such coordination, the Office aims to ensure that humanitarian needs are met in a coordinated and sustainable manner and with the support of the United Nations and the broader humanitarian community;

(h) **Improved intergovernmental decision-making.** The Office serves as the primary interface between the larger humanitarian community and the principal organs of the United Nations, such as the Security Council, the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, ensuring that intergovernmental bodies are well informed and take into account humanitarian concerns as part of their decision-making;

(i) **Policy coherence.** The experience of the Office suggests that staff working in the field are often confronted with a variety of challenges that require policy guidance. Such issues may include how to work with the military, how best to provide protection for internally displaced persons and how human rights may be linked with humanitarian work. The Office aims to articulate policy guidelines, primarily through the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, that help achieve a more coherent and principled approach to humanitarian action in the field;

(j) **Enhanced skills and professionalism.** The Office provides system-wide training for humanitarian actors, ensuring that staff engaged in humanitarian activities have consistent operational skills and a baseline knowledge of humanitarian issues. This is particularly true for humanitarian coordinators who, as the principal representatives of the Emergency Relief Coordinator in the field, require skills and training to be able to operate successfully in crisis situations. Developing a cadre of staff schooled in the knowledge of international humanitarian law and skilled in the best practice of humanitarian coordination promotes predictability and professionalism when responding to humanitarian crises.

V. Why humanitarian coordination would benefit from secure and predictable funding

18. As the scale of humanitarian emergencies and the number of humanitarian actors sharply increases, the United Nations is more often called upon to coordinate

and strengthen humanitarian assistance. Responding to these increased demands has led the United Nations to define humanitarian assistance as one of its priority activities.

19. In recognition of this, the General Assembly, in resolution 46/182, noted that the United Nations has a central and unique role to play in providing leadership and coordinating the efforts of the international community to support the affected countries, and emphasized that the United Nations should ensure the prompt and smooth delivery of relief assistance in full respect of humanitarian principles.

20. Humanitarian assistance is publicly recognized throughout the world as a critical component of the work of the United Nations. In a survey of perceptions of the United Nations, citizens from 13 countries cited humanitarian aid as its second most recognized function, after peacekeeping.[5]

21. As reiterated by the General Assembly and by the Economic and Social Council, and as acknowledged by humanitarian agencies, governments and the general public, humanitarian assistance is a critical component of the overall work of the United Nations. If a coordinated, effective and principled humanitarian response is to remain a United Nations priority, the standing capacity of the Office to perform key coordination functions should be supported with secure and predictable funding and should not be left to the ebbs and flows of voluntary contributions.

A. Secure funding would strengthen humanitarian coordination

22. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has demonstrated that humanitarian assistance in both conflict and disasters benefits from the consistency of vision and strategy that a coordinated response provides. For example, the coordination, planning and fund-raising efforts of the Office ahead of the Iraq crisis early in 2003 fostered a sense of trust, collegiality and shared purpose among humanitarian organizations at the outset, resulting in a coherent response that maximized the expertise of each of the humanitarian actors involved. Similarly, the partnerships forged by the Office with the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement and the Iranian authorities through the UNDAC and INSARAG networks in the wake of the earthquake in Bam in 2003, and the establishment of on-site coordination centres during the hurricanes in the Caribbean in 2004, resulted in complementarity in the division of labour and a faster, more efficient assistance effort, and sent a strong message of solidarity to the international community.

23. Such a response would not have been possible without the ability to engage humanitarian organizations and agencies in strategic and contingency planning; without well-maintained international partnerships, networks and tools; without interdepartmental and inter-agency coordination mechanisms; without effective advocacy and resource mobilization; without the guidance of broadly accepted and well-understood humanitarian policy guidelines; and without immediate access to timely and reliable information. The ability of the Office to maintain a standing capacity to prepare, plan and execute critical coordination activities depends on a secure and predictable funding base.

24. Recent experience has also shown that the lack of secure and predictable funding impedes the ability of the Office effectively to support and manage its

coordination efforts and to carry out key mandated functions. For example, a lack of funding for its evaluations and lessons learned unit meant that this function remained unstaffed for more than a year and that key humanitarian interventions were not systematically analysed or improved. A lack of predictable funding has also constrained the work of the Office in promoting the protection of civilians agenda with Member States by restricting its ability to retain key staff. The Office, instead, has had to rely — and continues to rely — on general temporary assistance funds to ensure that several mandated activities are not unduly delayed or left undone.

B. A secure, diverse funding base would ensure a more principled response

25. As part of its coordination role, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs aims to ensure that humanitarian assistance is provided in consideration of humanitarian principles and is commensurate with clearly defined and demonstrable need. The Office achieves this by strengthening emergency preparedness, early warning and contingency planning in countries and regions at risk of natural disasters and conflict, and by better aligning needs and resources. This is particularly important when acute crises shift donor priorities away from ongoing coordination functions to emergency response activities, and away from humanitarian crises in places such as Guinea, Nepal, Somalia and the Great Lakes region to crises with a higher international profile and greater strategic importance.

26. In addition, the General Assembly, in resolution 46/182, stipulated that assistance should be provided in full respect of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality. The long-term viability of humanitarian assistance is dependent upon adherence to such principles, in connection with which the Office has a critical role to play as leader and advocate. Such leadership is best supported by funding from the regular budget, where there is a collective commitment to accepted international norms.

C. Secure funding would free up time and resources for the pursuit of more strategic and substantive objectives

27. Voluntary contributions are less predictable than assessed contributions in terms of overall funding levels, timeliness and flexibility, thereby making it difficult for the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and its supporters fully to plan for, implement and balance their strategic and substantive objectives.

28. While the Office is able to secure extrabudgetary pledges for many of its coordination activities, the actual funds are often received late or on an irregular basis, generating cash-flow difficulties and delaying the implementation of critical programmes. For example, voluntary contributions for core coordination activities in 2003 were only received in the final quarter of the year, deferring the establishment in the Office of the key posts recommended by its change management process.

29. The levels and uses made of voluntary contributions are also often beyond the control of the United Nations Secretariat and the General Assembly. They are

subject to financial fluctuations, shifting donor priorities and are often earmarked for specific programmes and activities. Secure funding would ensure that critical coordination functions could be fully and consistently implemented. Predictable funding would afford the Office more flexibility in balancing its expenditure across different activities and regions.

30. Moreover, the administrative burden imposed on the Office by the pursuit, management and reporting of voluntary contributions is absorbing an ever-increasing amount of management and staff time, often at the expense of the substantive activities of the Office. Individual funding agreements with donors frequently require periodic and individual review and negotiation and can be tied to onerous administrative conditions that only grow with the increasing number and frequency of disasters and conflicts and the resulting demand on the services and tools of the Office. The availability of secure funding would allow the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the staff and management of the Office to spend less time on fund-raising and donor management activities and more time on its mandated tasks.

31. Finally, supporting effective coordination through increased funding from the regular budget would help the Office to direct resource mobilization efforts and limited donor funds towards addressing humanitarian emergencies rather than to supporting administrative functions.

VI. Defining the administrative functions of the Office

32. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs requires a secure and standing capacity at its headquarters to confront the challenges of today's crises, to meet the demands and expectations of its partners and stakeholders and to mitigate the risks inherent in emergency response. In this context, the Committee for Programme and Coordination, at its forty-third session, requested the Secretary-General to define the administrative functions of the Office. The framework for defining the administrative functions of the Office — or those standing functions that are critical to discharging its mandate and must receive secure and predictable support — is proposed below.

A. Conceptual framework

33. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs is concerned with coordination, not response. Response to country-specific crises will continue to be funded from extrabudgetary resources raised through the consolidated appeals process. This includes field office requirements in recognition of the fact that, from the establishment of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, the field activities have been funded from voluntary contributions. Therefore, in the context of the present report, the conceptual framework is confined to the administrative coordination functions discharged by the Office at Headquarters.

34. The criteria used for developing the framework were based on (a) the requirement for the Office effectively to fulfil its mandate, as defined by Member States; and (b) the requirement for it to maintain a standing capacity to carry out simultaneously its headquarters functions, deploy qualified coordination staff to the field and ensure sufficient field support.

35. The Office derives its legitimacy and the basis of its work from two principal documents. Its mandate stems from General Assembly resolution 46/182, in which the Assembly recognized the need for more coherent and consolidated humanitarian action by the United Nations system and called for the designation of a high-level Emergency Relief Coordinator, supported by a secretariat. By the same resolution, the Assembly initiated the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, the consolidated appeals process and the Central Emergency Revolving Fund to strengthen coordination.

36. The General Assembly, in resolution 52/12 B of 17 December 1997, endorsed the recommendation made by the Secretary-General in the context of his programme for reform (see A/51/950, para. 189) and decided to designate the Emergency Relief Coordinator as the United Nations Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator. The Secretary-General defined the role of the Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator as comprising the following three functions:

(a) Policy development and coordination functions in support of the Secretary-General, ensuring (i) that all humanitarian issues, including those which fall between gaps in existing mandates of agencies, such as protection and assistance for internally displaced persons, are addressed, and (ii) adequate liaison with the peacekeeping, political, development and human rights arms of the United Nations;

(b) Advocacy of humanitarian issues with political organs, notably the Security Council;

(c) Coordination of humanitarian emergency response, by ensuring that an appropriate response mechanism is established, through consultations in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, on the ground (A/51/950, para. 186).

37. In addition, by resolution 52/12 B, the Assembly established a humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council to provide guidance on overall humanitarian issues and coordination.

38. In January 1998, the Secretary-General established the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Over time, the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council have further elaborated on the role of the Office. The Secretary-General has implemented the resulting recommendations through follow-up bulletins, statements and reports.

B. Definition of functions

39. In the past, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has used its support from the General Assembly to carry out both substantive programme activities and what traditionally would be considered administrative functions. Therefore, for the purposes of the present report, the administrative functions of the Office are defined as those functions that embody the standing capacity that it requires at Headquarters to meet effectively the demands and expectations of General Assembly resolution 46/182 and subsequent intergovernmental decisions. The functions, therefore, must be based on one of the following criteria:

(a) They must be explicitly mandated by an intergovernmental body, including the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council;

(b) They must respond to priorities defined by the Secretary-General in response to the decisions of intergovernmental bodies.

C. Standing functions of the Office

40. Based on the above-mentioned definition, and in consideration of more than 10 years of practice, the Office has identified its standing functions to be:

Humanitarian coordination and leadership

(a) Leadership of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator at Headquarters as the principal humanitarian adviser of the Secretary-General and United Nations focal point on a range of issues with humanitarian implications; provision of support to the humanitarian coordinator and United Nations country teams at the field level in negotiating access to vulnerable populations; and facilitation and coordination of the overall response;

(b) Coordination of emergency and disaster preparedness and response, including the development and maintenance of an internal surge capacity to deploy experienced and qualified staff to the field, a standby capacity of international emergency mechanisms, tools and on-site coordination structures that may be mobilized as soon as a complex emergency ensues or a disaster strikes;

(c) Liaison with the departments of the United Nations Secretariat and with partners and stakeholders in New York and Geneva, using the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, to ensure both that humanitarian perspectives are incorporated into peacekeeping, political, development and human rights agendas, and that humanitarian needs are being met in a coordinated way;

(d) Strategic and contingency planning and the coordination of inter-agency needs assessments to define common goals and to quantify needs as a crisis evolves;

(e) Joint resource mobilization and planning through the management of the consolidated appeals process, including the common humanitarian action plan, which provides a common vision and strategy for determining funding requirements; administration of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, an emergency cash-flow mechanism under the authority of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator that helps to bridge the gap between needs and the available funding and other disaster response funds;

Policy development

(f) Development of humanitarian policy in support of the Secretary-General, including thematic policy frameworks and operational guidelines, in particular on issues that do not fall squarely within the mandate of one agency but are of common concern, such as terms of engagement with armed groups and the protection of civilians in armed conflict;

(g) Development of common policies to improve complex emergency and natural disaster planning, preparedness and response, including in protracted disasters, such as drought;

(h) Promotion of international aid strategies that reinforce compliance with humanitarian principles by working with Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs partners to protect civilians through the application of those principles;

(i) Development of evaluation and monitoring mechanisms to ensure that best practice and lessons learned are incorporated into future humanitarian operations;

Humanitarian advocacy

(j) Advocacy of humanitarian issues on behalf of vulnerable populations by raising the profile of neglected emergencies and increasing awareness of needs and resource gaps through campaigns, field visits and briefings to the media, permanent representatives, and regional and donor groups, and by mobilizing resources to address those needs;

(k) Promotion of humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality through the leadership of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and by guiding particular assistance strategies in cooperation with Member States;

(l) Reporting and coordination of reports to the General Assembly and its subsidiary bodies on humanitarian affairs;

(m) Briefing the Security Council on humanitarian crises that have security implications;

Information analysis, management and dissemination

(n) Provision of support for contingency planning and response coordination through the systematic pooling, analysis and dissemination of early warning information on natural disasters and other emergencies;

(o) Provision of support for decision-making through the synthesis, management and dissemination of humanitarian information at all levels and during all phases of a crisis, such as through the timely coordination of situation reports and the broad dissemination of such reports and other data and information via electronic services such as ReliefWeb, OCHA-Online and the Integrated Regional Information Network;

(p) Provision of support for advocacy and public information through the provision of timely and accurate information;

(q) Financial tracking of emergency aid flows on behalf of the international community to identify resource gaps;

Field coordination support

(r) Provision of policy, advocacy and decision-making support to the humanitarian coordinator and United Nations country teams;

(s) Substantive guidance to field offices by providing advice on issues affecting field operations, including the incorporation of gender perspectives into

assistance work, peacebuilding and staff security, and on the use of armed escorts and military assets in humanitarian operations;

(t) Provision of information and communication technology support by developing and maintaining systems and tools to facilitate planning and response coordination, such as the central register of experts, relief supplies and civil defence assets, as well as maps and databases that highlight gaps and overlaps;

(u) Provision of administrative, human resource, logistical and financial support for field coordination activities;

Management of inter-agency and interdepartmental mechanisms

(v) Provision of leadership and support to the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs and their associated working groups in order to facilitate inter-agency decision-making on the response to complex emergencies and disasters.

VII. Conclusions and recommendations

41. Humanitarian action is a critical element of the work of the United Nations, and humanitarian coordination has become a lynchpin in helping it to succeed. Since its creation in 1998, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs has evolved to meet the challenges of more numerous and complex crises by providing overall leadership, through the Emergency Relief Coordinator, on humanitarian issues; by coordinating the humanitarian response in cooperation with its partners in the United Nations system; by developing policies on issues of common concern and advocating on behalf of the system for those in need; by developing and maintaining a diversity of coordination mechanisms, services and tools to make the response flexible, dynamic and coherent; and by collecting and disseminating timely and accurate information to better inform the response. As a result, humanitarian agencies and donors have come to value the common tools, methods and goals that coordination brings.

42. Effective coordination, however, requires sufficient qualified staff and secure and predictable material resources. It has therefore been recognized by Member States, the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the General Assembly that the Office must enjoy more secure and predictable funding.

43. The present brief report outlines a framework that can serve as a basis for the General Assembly to give proper consideration to the coordination of humanitarian assistance in the strategic planning and programming of the activities of the United Nations as a whole, as well as in the programme budgeting process.

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifty-eighth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/58/16), para. 403.

[2] Ibid., para. 407.

[3] Ibid., para. 409.

[4] Ibid., *Fifty-ninth Session, Supplement No. 16* (A/59/16), para. 328.

[5] Zogby International, *Opinions of the United Nations, 1999* (New York, 1999), p. 3.